

Suggested Planning Process

A Guide for the Chair or Facilitator

Suggested Time Table

Month	Activity
Month 1	Committee Meeting 1: Getting Started
Month 2	Committee Meeting 2: Presenting and Discussing Assessment Findings
Month 3	Committee Meeting 3: Presenting and Discussing Assessment Findings
Month 4	Committee Meeting 4: Planning Follow-Up Activities
Month 5*	Committee Meeting 5: Work Session
Month 6	Community Forum (optional) or additional work session
Month 7	Committee Meeting 6: Developing a Technology Plan
Month 8	Committee Meeting 7: Finalizing the Technology Plan
Month 9	Committee Meeting 8: Developing an Implementation Plan
Months 10+	Building Community Support and Implementing the Plan

**Some communities may need more than one work session.*

Establishing an Information Technology Committee

The first step in the strategic planning process is forming a community information technology committee. This committee may be a subcommittee of an existing community/economic development committee or a separate committee. Forming countywide or regional partnerships to address IT issues may help communities leverage their existing resources. Information technology committees should consist of 8-24 members, including representatives of the following sectors:

- local government
- business
- economic development organizations
- education
- health care
- libraries
- telecommunications providers (if possible)
- criminal justice, law enforcement, and emergency services
- non-profits, arts, culture, and history groups (if possible)
- and other significant groups or sectors with the community.

Extra effort should be made to recruit representatives of the community's largest users of telecommunications and information technology. If possible, meet with representatives of the largest telecommunications users to personally invite them to participate and to learn how they are using technology, how much they are spending on telecommunications and information technology, what are their current technology needs, what are their future technology needs, and what the community can do to help them meet their technology needs.

Committee members should be willing to commit to attending monthly meetings for nine to twelve months until the assessment and planning process is complete. Most meetings should take 2-3 hours. Implementation of the plan will require a continuing time commitment from committee members. After a technology plan has been developed, the committee may opt to meet for one to two hours every other month. During the implementation phase, other members may need to be recruited.

Committee Meeting 1

Getting Started

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

It is important that the individuals who can complete assessment information on the following e-readiness areas attend this meeting: community leadership and support; telecommunications infrastructure; technology literacy and access; advanced technology training; economic development and e-commerce; public library services; education; health care; local government and community services; criminal justice, law enforcement, and emergency services. If a representative from one of these areas cannot attend, the chair should make arrangements to have someone complete the assessment information for that area.

Estimated Time

2-3 hours

Materials Needed

Copies of the *Community Information Technology Planning Workbook* for each member of the committee

Preparation

Confirm that a representative of every area to be included in the community assessment will be present. If a representative will not be present, the chair should make arrangements to have someone complete the assessment information for that area.

Make copies the *Community Information Technology Planning Workbook* for each committee member.

Review the planning process described in this guide; the *Is Your Community an Information Age Community?* quiz (pages 33-37); the benchmark data (pages 25-27); the article on technology trends (pages 29-32), and the *Community E-Readiness Assessment* (pages 39-84).

Outcomes

- Committee members will have a better understanding of the characteristics of an Information Age community.
- Committee members will begin to develop a vision of their community as an Information Age community.
- Committee members will understand the assessment and planning process that will be used.
- Committee members will determine the breadth of the assessment. Rather than completing each section of the assessment, some communities may narrow the assessment to three or four areas. The areas most often included are community leadership; economic development and e-commerce; telecommunications infrastructure; and technology literacy and access.
- The committee will be organized to complete the initial assessment, including:
 - Designating section leaders to complete assessment information, and
 - Setting the next meeting date(s).

Tip: Facilitate Multi-Community Committees

Here are some tips from Patty Barstow, the Executive Director of the North Central Development Center in Ainsworth, who facilitated the development of a technology plan for Keya Paha, Brown and Rock Counties.

- Select committee members that are interested in technology growth.
- Have work sessions instead of meetings so you don't have to worry about quorums, etc.
- Have a large enough group to cover the members that lose interest or don't attend work sessions.
- Make sure all counties/communities are represented equally.
- Make sure all members have email and check it regularly.
- Have 2-3 hour work sessions and don't meet as often.
- Keep work sessions moving so members don't feel they are wasting time.
- Rotate meeting places between counties/communities and alternate times to accommodate members' schedules.
- Utilize e-mail for contact between work sessions.
- Conduct some work sessions via e-mail if most agenda items are following up previous discussions with research/feedback.
- Keep members well informed with work session dates/times, agendas, work session summaries, research web sites, etc.
- Request RSVP's for work sessions so you know who is planning to attend and who is reading their e-mail.
- Accept the fact that there will not be full attendance at all work sessions.
- Accept the fact that some members will lose interest.

Members from the committee were selected to represent each of the e-readiness areas. The most important thing is to have all committee members online and encourage (sometimes insist) they check their e-mail often. If you entice them with having some work sessions via e-mail they are more willing to check it regularly.

We conducted monthly work sessions that lasted from two to three hours. The rationale for this was to accomplish lots of work with the least amount of travel time (an issue in our rural area, especially in winter). Agendas were e-mailed several days before the work session then I followed each session with an email summary of what was discussed/decided. I also sent another e-mail mid-month with a reminder of the date of the next work session. I did most of the research for the survey, etc. then e-mailed information to the members so they could review them before the work session. This kept everyone up to date.

We rotated our work sessions between the three counties and also alternated between afternoon and evening. About midway through the process I began requesting RSVP's. I did this for two reasons. First, that told if some were not reading their e-mails. If I felt someone wasn't reading their e-mail regularly, I would call "just to update" them then casually ask them to watch for more info via e-mail. Second, it allowed me to change the meeting place, or even time, if all attendees happened to be from one community. For example, if everyone coming was from Ainsworth, we had the meeting here instead of everyone driving to a different town.

When working with a large group from several communities, you must assume there will not be full attendance at all work sessions. I tried to keep everyone informed and encouraged them to participate with feedback and attend the community forums.

Meeting Description

Welcome and Introductions. Thank members for coming. If members of the committee do not know each other, ask members to introduce themselves.

Provide an Overview. Explain that Information Age communities are communities which utilize information technology to enhance economic and community development. In order to give committee members a better understanding of the usage of information technology in the state and in the county, it is helpful to have committee members look at the benchmark data on pages 25-27 and the information on technology trends (pages 29-32).

Take the Quiz. Next, introduce committee members to the characteristics of Information Age communities by asking members to complete the nine-question *Is Your Community an Information Age Community?* quiz (pages 33-37). Ask the following questions to stimulate discussion:

- How many think the community is a Traditional Economy community? An Emerging Information Age community? An Information Age community?
- Was anyone surprised by how the community scored on this assessment?
- Many people equate information technology development with telecommunications infrastructure. This assessment only contained two questions on infrastructure. Was anyone you surprised by the inclusion of any of the questions on the assessment?
- What are the community's areas of strength?
- What areas are weaknesses?
- Can you envision the community becoming an Information Age Community in 5-10 years?
- Are you willing to help the community become an Information Age community?

After a discussion of the committee's preliminary assessment of the community's e-readiness, explain the importance of developing a community technology plan to help the community become an Information Age community.

Introduce Technology Planning. Explain the planning process which consists of the following steps:

- Forming an information technology committee;
- Conducting a preliminary technology assessment using the *Community E-Readiness Assessment*;
- Conducting supplemental assessment activities and building community support;
- Developing a technology plan; and
- Implementing the plan.

Introduce the *Community E-Readiness Assessment*. The *Community E-Readiness Assessment* (pages 39-84) has six e-readiness areas:

- Community Leadership and Support
- Economic Development and E-Commerce
- Telecommunications Infrastructure
- Technology Literacy and Access
- Advanced Technology Training
- Community Services and Information
 - Public Library Services
 - Education
 - Health Care

- Local Government and Community Services
- Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement, and Emergency Services
- Non-profits, Arts, Culture, and History

Information is also included on quality of life and social capital. Although quality of life and social capital are important to a community's success in the Information Age, they are usually beyond the scope of a technology committee.

Complete the Community Leadership Section. Complete the Community Leadership section as a group.

Determine the Breadth of the Assessment. Although it is recommended that committee members assess all six areas, committees may narrow the focus of the assessment by skipping certain sections or subsections. For example, a community which does not have a hospital or medical clinic may wish to skip the health care subsection. Some groups have already identified their priority areas and may want to focus their assessment on those e-readiness areas.

Tip: Narrow the Focus of the Assessment

Consider narrowing the focus of the assessment to 3 to 5 e-readiness areas if:

- A committee is addressing IT-related development for the first time and finds the prospect of completing the entire assessment daunting;
- A committee is taking a regional approach and includes several communities;
- A committee has time constraints (i.e., needing to complete the assessment quickly or if the committee can only meet over lunch or other short periods of time);
- A committee has already clearly defined its areas of focus; or
- A committee recognizes that one issue (i.e., telecommunications infrastructure) is particularly pressing and will require a great deal of effort to address.

Assign Sections to Committee Members. Ask technology committee members to volunteer to be section leaders. Section leaders will be responsible for answering parts A and B in their section. For some sections, it may be helpful to get the input of other community members. For example, a group of business people could be asked to help answer the economic development/e-commerce sections. Each section is available as a Word document from <http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/workbook>. Section leaders should be encouraged to download the section, complete it, and e-mail it to the facilitator/chair prior to the meeting at which their section will be discussed. It is suggested that Economic Development and E-Commerce; Telecommunications Infrastructure; Technology Literacy and Access; and Advanced Technology Training be discussed at meeting 2. Community Services and Information may be discussed at meeting 3.

Set Meeting Dates. Set tentative dates for the next meeting(s).

Committee Assignments

Section leaders should complete parts A and B for their assigned section.

Committee Meeting 2

Presenting and Discussing Assessment Findings—Part 1

- **Economic Development and E-Commerce**
- **Telecommunications Infrastructure**
- **Technology Literacy and Access**
- **Advanced Technology Training**

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

2 hours (allowing 30 minutes for the Telecommunications Infrastructure session; 15 minutes for the Technology Literacy and Access section, 15 minutes for the Advanced Technology Training section; and 30 minutes for the Economic Development and E-Commerce section)

Materials Needed

Copies of the E-readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet
Laptop (optional) with Word version of the Community E-Readiness Assessment
(available at www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/workbook)

Preparation

If possible, have the section leaders e-mail you their assessment information. The assessment information can be e-mailed to committee members prior to the meeting. Confirm that section leaders for Economic Development and E-Commerce; Telecommunications Infrastructure; Technology Literacy and Access; and Advanced Technology Training will be present. If a section leader will not be able to attend, arrange to have an alternate present the findings from that section.

Tip: Keep the Assessment Process Moving

Try to limit the number of meetings devoted to going over the E-readiness Assessment to about two (not including the initial meeting). Groups which go over two meetings run the risk of losing task-oriented members who become frustrated at a perceived lack of progress.

The exact number of meetings required will vary. One group participating in the pilot was able to complete the E-readiness Assessment at their initial meeting. The group quickly narrowed down the assessment to four areas and completed all four sections. Most technology committees need two meetings to go over the assessment data.

In order to keep the assessment process moving, the facilitator or chair should collect assessment data from committee members and e-mail this information to members before the meeting. At the meeting, ask committee members to just give a brief overview of their findings, highlighting the most important information. At the beginning of the meeting state how much time will be allotted to the discussion of each area and keep reports within the allotted time.

Outcomes

- The initial community information technology assessment for Economic Development and E-Commerce; Telecommunications Infrastructure; Technology Literacy and Access; and Advanced Technology and Training will be completed.

Meeting Description

At the second information technology committee meeting, section leaders for Telecommunications Infrastructure; Technology Literacy and Access; Advanced Technology and Training; and Economic Development and E-Commerce should report their findings.

Get Started. If members did not receive copies of the completed e-readiness sections that are to be discussed via e-mail, pass out copies of the completed e-readiness sections. Pass out copies of the assessment summary worksheet to members. The worksheet will help members summarize the assessment findings. Remind section leaders to limit their presentations to the time allotted to them, asking them to just touch briefly on section A and spending more time on sections B and C. Suggested times for each e-readiness area are listed below:

- Telecommunications Infrastructure (30 minutes)
- Technology Literacy and Access (15 minutes)
- Advanced Technology Training section (15 minutes)
- Economic Development and E-Commerce (30 minutes)

Report E-readiness Findings. Section leaders for the areas listed above should give their reports. The committee should discuss section C for each section together, including how they would like the community to score in two to five years and the prioritization of each section. A recorder can record this information on a Word version of the assessment tool and on the E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet.

Set Meeting Date. A date for the next meeting should be set.

Committee Assignments

Section leaders for the Community Services and Information subsections should complete parts A and B for their assigned subsection and e-mail this information to the chair prior to the next meeting. If the assessment information presented so far was not already recorded into the assessment document and the E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet, the chair or recorder should complete these documents.

Committee Meeting 3

Presenting and Discussing Assessment Findings—Part 2 Community Services and Information

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

2 hours (allowing 15-20 minutes for each subsection of the Community Services and Information section)

Materials Needed

Copies of the E-readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet

Laptop (optional) with Word version of the Community E-Readiness Assessment (available at www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/workbook)

Preparation

If possible, have the section leaders e-mail you their assessment information. The assessment information can be e-mailed to committee members prior to the meeting. Confirm that section leaders for the Community Services and Information section will be present. If a section leader will not be able to attend, arrange to have an alternate present the findings from that section.

Outcomes

- The initial community information technology assessment for the Community Services and Information section will be completed.

Meeting Description

At the second information technology committee meeting, section leaders for the Community Services and Information section, including Public Library Services; Education; Health Care; Local Government and Community Services; Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement; and Emergency Services; and Non-profits, Arts, Culture, and History should report their findings.

Get Started. If members did not receive copies of the completed e-readiness sections that are to be discussed via e-mail, pass out copies of the completed e-readiness sections. Remind section leaders to limit their presentations to 15 minutes, asking them to just touch briefly on section A and spending more time on sections B and C.

Report E-readiness Findings. Section leaders should give their reports. The committee should discuss section C for each section together, including how they would like the community to score in two to five years and the prioritization of each section. A recorder can record this information on a Word version of the assessment tool and on the E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet.

Set Meeting Date. A date for the next meeting should be set.

Committee Assignments

The chair or recorder should compile all the assessment information presented so far if this information was not already recorded into the assessment document and the E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet.

Committee Meeting 4

Planning Follow-Up Activities

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

1½ to 2 hours

Materials Needed

Copies of the completed E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet, the Supplemental Assessment Activities Planning Worksheet, and the Building Community Support Planning Worksheet

Preparation

Send copies of the completed E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet to committee members prior to the meeting or bring copies of the summary worksheet to the meeting.

Outcomes

- High-priority e-readiness areas will be identified.
- If additional information is needed, a plan will be developed to obtain that information.
- A plan for involving the community in the planning process and building community support will be developed.

Success Story: Edgar Documents Needs, Receives Grant

The Edgar technology committee worked with Kay Payne at the [Center for Rural Research and Development](#) at the University of Nebraska--Kearney to conduct a community needs assessment survey which included a section on information technology. The surveys were hand-delivered and picked up by community volunteers, leading to a very high response rate (87%). The results of the survey were presented at a town hall meeting. Over 50 people attended the meeting.

The needs assessment found that there was strong community support for a community center. The Community of Edgar used documentation from the needs assessment to prepare an application for the Community Development Block Grant program and received a \$250,000 grant. Preliminary plans for the community center include a technology component.

Meeting Description

Use the Supplemental Assessment Activities Planning Worksheet and the Building Community Support Planning Worksheet to guide discussions and focus planning efforts.

Identify High-Priority E-Readiness areas. Use the completed E-Readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet to quickly list those e-readiness areas with the highest priority (Level 4).

Determine Additional Information Needed. Use the E-readiness Assessment Summary Worksheet to quickly identify which high-priority e-readiness areas require additional information to complete an assessment. What kind of information is needed? How can that information be obtained?

Develop a plan for collecting that information. Will you need to conduct a community survey, an engineering study, or another type of assessment? Use the Supplemental Assessment Activities Planning Worksheet to develop a plan for implementing these activities.

Develop a plan for building community support. Discuss how to involve the community in the planning process and to build community support for the plan.

Areas to consider:

- Should we host a community forum or town hall meeting to gather community input and to build support for the technology plan?
- If a community survey is being planned, should we include questions to gauge community support for technology-related development in general and possible activities (i.e., creating a community technology learning center or a technology incubator)?
- Should we present the assessment and the plan to the city council or county board?
- Should we present the assessment and the plan to community groups?
- Should we share the assessment and the plan with the press?
- Are there other ways to build community support?

Use the Building Community Support Planning Worksheet to develop a plan for building community support.

Set Meeting Date. A date for the next meeting should be set.

Member assignments

Members should work on any tasks assigned by the committee.

Committee Meeting 5

Work Session

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

1½ to 2 hours

Outcomes

- Progress should be made on the additional assessment activities underway or on activities designed to build community support.

Meeting Description

Report on Progress. Committee members should report on any progress made on additional assessment activities or on activities designed to build community support.

Work on Activities. If needed, time should be allowed to continue working on supplemental assessment activities.

Set Meeting Date. A date for the next meeting should be set.

Community Forum (Optional)

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee and members of the community

Estimated Time

2 hours

Outcomes

- Community members will understand the importance of information technology planning.
- Community members will begin to develop a vision of their community as an Information Age community.
- Community members will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the assessment and to prioritize areas for IT development.
- The committee will begin to build community support for information technology development and the plan that will be developed.

Forum Description

The forum should begin with a brief presentation which describes the importance of information technology and the need for communities to incorporate information technology into local economic development plans. After the presentation, committee members should present the results of their initial assessment.

After each presentation by section leaders, community members should be asked to indicate how they would like their community to score on the assessment in two to five years by a show of hands. At the end of the presentations by the section leaders, community members should be asked to indicate which areas are their highest priorities using the dot voting method or a show of hands.

Committee Assignments

The recorder should update the assessment document to include information from the forum. The updated assessment document should be e-mailed to members of the committee.

Committee Meeting 6

Developing a Technology Plan

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

2 hours

Materials Needed

Copies of the completed assessment materials and the Technology Plan Planning Worksheet

Preparation

If a community forum was held, information from the forum should be e-mailed to members of the committee.

Objectives

- Committee members will prioritize the e-readiness areas, identifying 3-5 areas that will be included in the technology plan.
- Committee members will develop a draft vision statement.
- Committee members will develop draft action plans for each e-readiness area that will be included in the technology plan.
- The date for the next meeting will be set.

Meeting Description

Prioritize E-readiness Areas. Based on assessment findings (including input from a community forum if applicable), committee members should prioritize the e-readiness areas, identifying 3-5 areas that should be included in the technology plan. This can often be done by consensus. If the committee is large, priorities can be determined by writing each assessment area on a large sheet of paper and having each member “vote” by placing a dot sticker by his/her three highest priorities.

Develop a Vision Statement. Using the Technology Plan Planning Worksheet, develop a vision statement, describing a clear vision of what you would like your community to become in three to five years as a result of this technology plan. Include references to your community’s priority e-readiness areas. You may want to use the descriptions of your target e-readiness level for each priority area as a starting point for the vision statement.

Tip: Identify a Volunteer to Draft Vision Statement

Writing in groups is often difficult and cumbersome. Once you have identified key points that should be included in the vision statement, it may be best to identify a volunteer or small group of volunteers to draft a vision statement and present it to the group at the next meeting.

Develop Action Plans. Use the Technology Plan Planning Worksheet to develop action plans for each e-readiness area which will be included in the plan. The section for each e-readiness area should include:

- Current e-readiness level
- Target e-readiness level
- Strengths
- Resources and assets
- Action plan (1 to 5 steps your community plans to take to address this area)

If the committee does not have enough time to complete the draft plan during the meeting, subcommittees can be formed to finish the sections for each priority area and present this information at the next meeting.

Set Meeting Date. A date for the next meeting should be set.

Committee Assignments

If necessary, members assigned to develop a vision statement or action plans should complete them before the next meeting.

Committee Meeting 7

Finalizing the Technology Plan

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

2 hours

Materials Needed

Copies of the draft technology plan and the completed Building Community Support Worksheet

Preparation

If necessary, check with subcommittee members to see if they have completed their draft action plans and vision statement.

Objectives

- The technology plan will be finalized.
- Plans for building community support will be reviewed.

Meeting Description

Finalize Technology Plan. If certain sections were not completed at the last meeting, the subcommittee members assigned to complete them should present their sections to the committee for their approval.

Review Plan for Building Community Support. Building community support is a key component to the successful implementation of a plan. Review plans for building community support and discuss any modifications or additions that should be made to the plan.

Celebrate. This is a good time to celebrate the completion of the technology plan.

Committee Assignments

Committee members should begin meeting with various community groups to build community input and support for the strategic plan. Committee members should also work on any other tasks assigned.

Committee Meeting 8

Developing an Implementation Plan

Who Should Attend

Members of the information technology committee

Estimated Time

2 hours

Materials Needed

Copies of the technology plan and the Implementation Planning Worksheet

Preparation

Distribute any supplemental information to committee members via e-mail

Objectives

- Plans for building community support will be reviewed.
- Implementation plans will be developed.

Meeting Description

Review Plan for Building Community Support. Building community support is a key component in the successful implementation of a plan. Review plans for building community support and discuss any modifications or additions that should be made to the plan.

Prioritize Implementation. Members should select two to five activities which will be undertaken first. Try to be realistic in determining the number of activities that can be undertaken. It is a good idea to choose both relatively easy activities which can be accomplished in less than a year and more challenging long-term activities which will take more than a year to complete. The implementation plan should be updated annually.

Develop Implementation Plans. Use the Implementation Planning Worksheet to begin developing an implementation plan. If additional time is needed, a subcommittee can be formed to continue working on the implementation plan and to present this information at the next meeting.

Set Next Meeting Date(s). As the committee moves from planning to implementation, some changes may need to be made to the committee membership and/or to the meeting schedule.